

Alexandria, Town of  
Huntingdon County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5407

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### TOWN OF ALEXANDRIA

HABS No. PA-5407

#### INTRODUCTION

Alexandria is a small central-Pennsylvania town that owes its development to the early-nineteenth-century construction of the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal, which opened up east-west commercial activity between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The canal bisected Alexandria, feeding off its Juniata River, and nourishing the thriving commercial and small-industrial center until well after the Civil War, even after it was purchased by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. After the canal was closed and the railroad main line bypassed Alexandria, the town's once-stable economy began to ebb.

Today, little physical evidence of the canal itself remains amid the largely extant stock of buildings from that era. The bulk of the vernacular residential and commercial architecture can be collectively characterized as modest, with the exception of a handful of high-style buildings erected late in the town's development. Collectively, however, they illustrate the development of a typical vernacular townscape. The purpose of this study is to chronicle the development of Alexandria--highlighted by nineteenth-century canal and railroad eras--with particular emphasis on the buildings and architectural heritage that remain intact.

#### LOCATION

Alexandria is located approximately 150 miles east of Pittsburgh in Porter Township, northwest Huntingdon County. Laid out in 1798, the town is nestled on the northeast shore of the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River, bounded on the west by one of its tributaries. It is situated approximately one mile east of the town of Water Street, one mile south of Barree and the Juniata River, and about seven miles northwest of Huntingdon.

The route of the former Pennsylvania Canal and existing Pennsylvania Railroad branch railbed traverses the borough along a southeast-to-northwest axis that roughly follows the river. Old U.S. 22 parallels this historical line through the borough, where it constitutes the majority of Main Street.

Topographically Alexandria lies between Warrior Ridge, which was noted for large deposits of fire-clay during the late-nineteenth century, and Tussey Mountain, which may have been named after early Porter Township settler John Tussey.<sup>1</sup> Where the Juniata River flows southeast past the town, it disrupts slightly the southern boundary of the grid. Rocky bluffs along its south bank overlook the town. Today, as in the eighteenth century, the tree-covered hills and surrounding countryside are filled with iron ore. The region is rich with clusters of sandstone and limestone deposits; along the streams, fertile soil tops a limestone base. During the late-nineteenth century the "Hart's Log Valley" was one of the most prosperous

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandria Community Bi-centennial (No publisher given, 1955).

agricultural regions in the county, boasting a number of prosperous farms.<sup>2</sup> Principal natural resources were timber and the Juniata River itself, collectively providing the basis for the commercial prosperity that occurred when the Pennsylvania Canal began operating in Alexandria.

#### EARLY SETTLEMENT: 1730 - 1829

White settlement of the Juniata Valley occurred after 1755 because William Penn and his heirs--the proprietaries of Pennsylvania--would not permit occupation of the land until it had been properly purchased from the Indians in 1754. Prior to this, as early as 1731, the only whites to travel through the valley were missionaries, explorers, government agents mapping the area, and Indian traders. One such man was John Hart. Licensed as a trader in 1744, Hart maintained a successful relationship with the Indians of western Pennsylvania until 1755, when settlers began to arrive--after which he is believed to have moved westward.<sup>3</sup>

Hart's legacy to the region and local lore was his name and the fallen white oak log at which legend says he salted his horses. Thus, the area was designated Hartslog Valley, in which the founding Alexandria land was called the Hartslog tract (Figure 3.1).

Pioneers settled along streams, rivers and other sources of water between Huntingdon and Tussey Mountain. The first house alleged to exist on the site of present-day Alexandria was built and occupied by two Scots, Matthew Neal and Hugh Glover. It served as a trading post for general goods as well as whiskey, which apparently contributed to so many brawls that the area was popularly known as "Battle Swamp."<sup>4</sup>

The first settlers to the Juniata Valley were largely the Scotch-Irish who immigrated for religious reasons. In their homeland they had been persecuted since the massacre of Irish Protestants in 1641, temporarily finding refuge in northern Scotland until laws were enacted that caused further hardship for both Irish and Scottish religious groups. After emigrating to Colonial America, they settled in concentration near the Maryland/Pennsylvania line.<sup>5</sup> Most were Presbyterian, although a good number of Lutherans and some Roman Catholics lived in the valley, too. As many as half the early settlers may have been agnostic.<sup>6</sup>

James Sterrat of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, purchased the 400-acre Hartslog tract in 1754 from the Provincial Government. The French and Indian War that began the following year, however, prohibited immediate settlement; it also discouraged and delayed attempts to survey

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<sup>2</sup> J. Simpson Africa, History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883), 408.

<sup>3</sup> Jean P. Harshbarger, Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie et al., Hartslog Heritage (State College, PA: K.B. Offset Printing, 1975), 7.

<sup>4</sup> U.J. Jones, History of the Juniata Valley (Harrisburg, PA: Telegraph Press, 1940), 183-84.

<sup>5</sup> I.D. Rupp, History and Topography of Northumberland, Huntingdon, Mifflin, Centre, Union, Columbia, Juniata and Clinton Counties, Pa. (Lancaster, PA: G. Hills, 1847), 74.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, 183.

the land.<sup>7</sup>

By 1766 John Gemmill (died 1785), an early arrival, owned the land that today comprises Alexandria--then part of Barree Township, Bedford County. Charles Caldwell and his family were isolated residents, for the influx of families proceeded slowly until after the Revolutionary War, which marked the beginning the Hartslog area's steady settlement. The county's population had increased dramatically enough to warrant a division, so in 1787--the same year Pennsylvania ratified the Constitution and became a state--Huntingdon County was formed out of the northern portion of Bedford, a common practice as the density of developing regions increased.<sup>8</sup>

Part of this population increase occurred in what was to become Alexandria, where a number of dwellings were erected in the 1790s. In 1796 all the buildings in Alexandria except one were constructed of log, according to tax-assessment records. Four years later, twenty-six dwellings existed that presumably housed the town's 139 inhabitants.<sup>9</sup>

In 1793 Elizabeth Gemmill (1735-1823), widow of John Gemmill, had the town of Alexandria formally laid out; the origin of the name is unknown. The town was organized on a grid pattern, the typical planning practice in the western frontier during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Front (also historically cited as First and Main) Street parallels the river, followed on the north by Second (Shelton) Street and Third (Pine) Street. These three primary thoroughfares are subdivided by 20-foot alleys and intersect with South, Bridge, and Hartslog streets. This grid was divided into 100 lots measuring 60 feet by 200 feet, except for those in the eastern section along the river. Four shorter tracts bounded the "Diamond," the site of a pre-1800 twice-weekly market house.

These diamonds, "an open space consisting of the right-angle intersection of two streets at or near the most functionally central point of a town," are common elements to towns such as Alexandria in west-central Pennsylvania.<sup>10</sup> Its location one block from Main Street and the pike, implies a hoped-for development for this section of town, one that was apparently derailed by the introduction of the canal. The cost of land (given in English pounds), for instance, puts this area at the most exclusive: lots around the diamond were priced at £7; on Main Street, £5.10; Second Street, £4; and Third Street, £3.<sup>11</sup> Gemmill, and later her heirs, collected ground rent amounting to about \$1 a year for each of these lots from 1793 until about 1920, when the practice was outlawed.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Harshbarger, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Harshbarger, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Harshbarger, 13, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Wilbur Zelinsky, "The Pennsylvania Town: An Overdue Geographical Account," The Geographical Review (April 1977), 136.

<sup>11</sup> Harshberger, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Africa, 426.

The Gemmill claim to the Hartslog land was not actually upheld by the Board of Property until 1796, however. This may be the reason that although the surveyed lots were rented and built upon from 1793, none was actually sold until five years later when the town plan was attested to and recorded on August 7, 1798.<sup>13</sup> Main Street buildings included those of William McKillip, Lewis Mytinger, and Matthew Gray, as well as the dwellings and businesses of Christian Kemler on the diamond and Robert Stitt on Second Street,

One of the oldest dwellings in Alexandria, as well as the only stone structure still standing, is that of merchant and contractor John Cresswell (HABS No. PA-5400), which he erected about 1816 at Main and High streets. A typical early-nineteenth century dwelling, it is three bays wide and two stories high organized on a side-hall plan with a one-story rear ell that historically contained the kitchen.

#### Commerce/Industry

The industry necessary to fuel Alexandria's early commercial activities along the Juniata River was small and scarce. Those businesses that did exist were designed for local production and consumption. Early skilled laborers included Stitt, a joiner; Kemler, a hatter; and McKillip, a tanner. There were also cobblers, carpenters (many, like Benjamin Cross, who built houses), smiths and--crucial to valley development--millers. By 1808 a modestly busy trading character was evolving in Alexandria, from whence timber arks and log rafts transported the valley's products downriver. These included an array of goods that reflect the locale's agricultural economy--grain, whiskey and flour--as well as wood for charcoal and the most important export item, iron.

The transportation of Juniata iron from two forges in the general vicinity was the largest industrial enterprise in Alexandria at that time. The Barree Forge opened north of town in 1794 and originally processed iron from the Centre Furnace in Centre County; later it obtained its iron from the nearby Mt. Etna Furnace. Alexandria shipped its products, as well as those of the Huntingdon Furnace and the Tyrone and Dorsey forges.<sup>14</sup>

In 1810 Alexandria's population was 751. Yet only four years later its area had increased enough to justify the establishment of Porter Township, named for Revolutionary War General Andrew Porter, an area today defined by Porter, Walker and Juniata townships.<sup>15</sup> Although agriculture and the iron industry continued to be the economic mainstay of the area, local development is reflected in the diversification and slight sophistication of local commerce. Porter Township could boast seven distilleries, three grist mills, four sawmills, three tanneries, one hempmill, one fulling mill, and one carding machine.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Alexandria Community Bi-Centennial, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Harshbarger, 16, 24.

<sup>15</sup> John W. Jordan, A History of the Juniata Valley and its People (N.Y.: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1913), 79; Milton Scott Lytle, History of Huntingdon County in the State of Pennsylvania (Lancaster: William H. Roy, 1876), 299.

<sup>16</sup> Alexandria Community Bi-Centennial, 10.

Several taverns and inns existed in Alexandria by this time, and at least one served as the stage-coach office and pick-up point. During the winter of 1809-10, for example, the stage departed each Saturday from the public house of John Walker on Main Street, two lots east of Hartslog Street<sup>17</sup>; since the stage traveled along this primary thoroughfare--which superseded the lower road to Water Street--this was the ideal location for lodging establishments.

Some buildings were not erected for this express purpose, but were converted from dwellings at a later time. One of these is Robert Lytle's Shelter Inn (HABS No. PA-5408), one of the oldest buildings in town, erected about 1804 for one of Elizabeth Gemmill's daughters. The two-story, Federal-style brick inn was located on Second Street, near the canal and one block north of the Main Street.

General merchandise stores provided supplies from clothing to dry goods to pocket Bibles, although the businesses seemed to change hands or turn over with great frequency. William Moore purchased the store of John Ostler on Main Street in 1830; built about 1798 (lot No. 9), Moore was the fourth owner and occupant.

A series of physicians served Alexandria beginning in 1801 with Drs. John Buchanan and Silas Dibble, as well as Dr. James Charlton, who was in partnership with Dr. Daniel Houtz. Houtz advertised in 1828 "a new apothecary establishment in Alexandria in the house lately occupied by Conrad Bucher, one door east of Bucher and Porter's store"; he would not erect his two-story brick house and office (HABS No. PA-5401, 5402) near central Main Street until 1842, however.<sup>18</sup>

### Transportation

Pennsylvania's earliest transportation system evolved during the 1750s. In the Hartslog Valley, the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River was a major east-west waterway and means of travel. The Frankstown Path, the major east-west overland route--also known as the Great Road--forded the Juniata at Hartslog Street at what was then the west edge of the community. The road then turned west toward the town of Water Street. Most roads were so crude and unreliable that they could only accommodate travelers on foot or horseback.

After the turn of the century, road improvements opened up the interior, and as early as 1804 the stage arrived in Alexandria every two weeks.<sup>19</sup> Four years later the Juniata Mail Stage Line--the first stage route in Huntingdon County--made a weekly stop in Alexandria, the route's western terminus.<sup>20</sup> The frequency of stage runs increased again in 1808 after the turnpike from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh, via Alexandria, was "opened, digged and bridged [so] that horses and wagons could pass and repass." As a result, weekly mail and stage service commenced that same year. Passengers paid 6 cents per mile, which included 14 pounds of

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<sup>17</sup> Alexandria Community Bi-Centennial, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Harshbarger, 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> Clarence D. Stephenson, 175th, 165.

<sup>20</sup> Africe, 426.

luggage.<sup>21</sup>

### Community

There was little in the way of formal entertainment in Alexandria prior to the canal boom. One of the most popular social activities--for participants and observers--was the local militia drill, which included the Huntingdon Light Dragoons of Alexandria. As the threat levied by the War of 1812 diminished, the militia met less and less frequently until it was finally disbanded in 1837.

Dancing at "publick balls" and private gatherings was another leisure pastime. In 1804, for instance, dancing master Blondel St. Hilaire hosted a ball at John Walker's tavern starting at "early candlelight." The Presbyterian church was apparently opposed to such public gatherings, though private ones were acceptable.<sup>22</sup>

Boys and girls attended private schools in Alexandria prior to the Free School Act of 1834 when the public school law was passed in Pennsylvania, although this legislation did not make attendance mandatory. A schoolmaster was sought through newspaper advertisements as early as 1807, and throughout the early decades of the century more than one person in this capacity resided in the Alexandria area. The first school was a log building that sat where the Presbyterian Cemetery is today. This was replaced about 1830 by the "'Octagon' brick school house which stood on the hill, not far from the old log house," on R.G. Stewart's farm. On or shortly after this, a school for girls was established by a Miss Armstrong in a blue house located on town lot No. 12. Anne Gemmill Stewart founded a school in her house between 1826-32; but located on lot No. 107, it lay within the canal right-of-way and was shortlived. In 1835, the first elected school officials for Porter Township were Isaac Martin, Dr. Daniel Houtz, G.B Young, Thomas Hanna, Henry Knode and John Hewitt.<sup>23</sup>

For many years the area's only religious gatherings were those of the Hartslog Presbyterian congregation, formed in 1785. In 1814 this group split because of a perceived pro-British remark made by the reverend, and five years later the unhappy faction erected the frame "White Church" on land now occupied by Alexandria's Presbyterian Cemetery, bought from Elizabeth Gemmill for \$30. In 1825 the Hartlog Presbyterian Church built its own brick meeting house on the site of the present Christ United Church of Christ, which the congregation used until 1831 when it was reconciled and reunited with the former group. Henceforth they met in the White Church until 1851; the brick meeting house was sold to James Wilson in 1833 for \$800. The first Methodist congregation was formed in 1828, followed a year later by a Sunday school, but it was not until the mid 1830s that they erected a church on lot No. 159 at a cost of \$450.

Poised on the cusp of a new era, all facets of Alexandria's development were merging to form a well-rounded and healthy community. Transportation improvements permitted easier travel and better communication. The pike, constructed by the Huntingdon, Cambria and

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<sup>21</sup> Lytle, 138-40; Harshbarger, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Harshbarger, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Harshbarger, 29-30.

Indiana Turnpike Road Company, was financed through the sale of stock; and upon completion a toll was charged travelers at periodic gates, one of which was located between Alexandria and Water Street. The seventy-seven mile section between Huntingdon and Blairsville was completed in 1820; a 12-inch mile marker with an iron plaque was extant on the north side of Main Street near High Street as late as 1976.<sup>24</sup> By February 1829 daily stages ran through Alexandria, which found itself advantageously located on the main highway leading West.<sup>25</sup> The turnpike physically developed as an extension of Main Street, paralleling the northwest path of the river and the old "Road to Waterstreet" that lay between the new turnpike and the river. In 1831 the bridge carrying the turnpike over the branch of the Juniata below Alexandria was complete. That same year, next-day mail service was provided from Harrisburg to Alexandria; two-day service continued on to Pittsburgh.

Although maps indicate that in general only a handful of buildings were located west of Hartslog Street, it is possible that some early dwellings, such as the Patrick McManus House (HABS No. PA-5393) built concurrent or prior to the turnpike, intentionally fronted this new thoroughfare. A two-story frame house on the western edge of present-day Alexandria, the McManus house has been modified over the years to include a partially recessed south facade that undoubtedly served as a rear porch.

In April 1827 the town's growth was officially recognized by its incorporation as a borough; extension of the western boundary--the same as today's--was approved on April 4, 1831.<sup>26</sup> One burgess and five councilmen made up the elected council, which drew support from the clerk and other officers. After Main Street extended westward, however, additional lots were laid out along both flanks, which sold for \$25 to \$75 each.<sup>27</sup> Dr. James Trimble, grandson-in-law of Elizabeth Gemmill, platted the first addition to the borough and began selling lots in 1829, though this transaction was not recorded until July 1847. He was almost certainly motivated by the rising population and prosperity ensured by the canal.<sup>28</sup> Two later additions resulted in enlarged town boundaries: Brown's Addition at the time of the 1827 incorporation, and a similar size tract along Main Street by Mary Ann McLain.

Just over thirty years after Elizabeth Gemmill laid out Alexandria, it was a community characterized by a fairly homogeneous society that combined activities of religion, education, and commerce. Almost all inhabitants were a mix of the Scotch-Irish and German descent that still predominates; there were few ethnic or religious minorities.

## CANAL ERA: 1830 - 1875

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<sup>24</sup> Pennsylvania Historic Resources Inventory form.

<sup>25</sup> Africa, 427.

<sup>26</sup> Africa, 426.

<sup>27</sup> Alexandria Community Bi-Centennial, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Africa, 426.



Vital to the continued prosperity of Alexandria's commercial center was the announcement of the forthcoming Pennsylvania Canal, an important central link in a statewide system ultimately composed of more than 1,200 miles.<sup>29</sup> Formal preparations for the waterway began in 1823 when the Pennsylvania General Assembly appointed a canal commission. Two years later, plans under way for the canal to extend west through Alexandria (Figure 3.2) to at least Hollidaysburg precipitated a building boom that was founded on a renewed sense of permanency. Brick was introduced as the preferred building material for houses and stores, usurping a regional tradition of log and stone construction associated with the settlement era.

Most architecturally elaborate structures were built during the period of canal-related affluency between 1830 and 1850, when the number of dwellings rose to between sixty-four and 100.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the legacy of Scotch-Irish and German inhabitants is a number of solidly built brick and frame houses combined with two nationally popular architectural movements, Federal and Greek Revival styling. An estimated 1,221 persons lived in Alexandria in 1830,<sup>31</sup> many of whom likely arrived as canal-construction laborers.

Despite the projected prosperity associated with the canal, several Alexandrians had reservations about its construction. One concern stemmed from the supposition that the canal would usurp the turnpike, for which Alexandria residents had contributed considerable financial support. The town's inhabitants were probably also aware of the hostility felt by wagoners and railroad promoters toward its coming.<sup>32</sup> Yet, the largest harbinger of anti-canal sentiments may have been the collective body of landowners whose property the canal path would cut short.

Canal commissioners and their surveyors selected the right-of-way primarily by drawing a straight line that paralleled as closely as possible the river; affected landowners could make claims for buildings lost or damages sustained due to construction.<sup>33</sup> The canal required the flattest available land, to necessitate the fewest possible locks; this formula inevitably entailed crossing a number of privately owned lots. Many claims for compensation were filed for damages incurred during construction.

The Juniata Division of the Pennsylvania Canal main line was legislated in 1827 (and amended shortly thereafter) to extend from Duncan's Island to Hollidaysburg, a route of a little more than 127 miles. By 1831 the canal between Huntingdon and Hollidaysburg was under way, and work continued until spring 1833 when regular shipping began. The Juniata Division

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<sup>29</sup> McCullough, 170.

<sup>30</sup> Harshbarger, 41.

<sup>31</sup> Jordan, 211.

<sup>32</sup> Alvin F. Herlow, Old Towpaths (NY: D. Appleton and Co., 1926), 138.

<sup>33</sup> Robert McCullough and Walter Leuba, The Pennsylvania Main Line Canal (York, PA: American Canal and Transportation Center, 1973), 44.

cost \$2.6 to \$3.6 million to build, well beyond the original estimate of \$1.7 million.<sup>34</sup> Topographic conditions, particularly the mountains, rendered construction relatively difficult. Altogether, this division required eighty-eight locks to overcome a rise of 582 feet. Locks No. 49 and No. 50 were constructed in Alexandria just west and east of Hartslog Street; there was a bridge across the canal at Hartslog Street .

In Alexandria, the lockkeeper's house (HABS No. PA-5406) was built along the canal path across from the Shelter Inn, fronting it along Hartslog Street at an angle--in keeping with the canal route--that defied the town grid. It is unknown whether this house (ca. 1832) was erected by the canal commission or by Robert McClelland--and moved--from whom the lot was "taken by the common W. [commonwealth] for [a] lock house" in 1835.<sup>35</sup> The modest, framed gable house was nevertheless oriented with the canal in mind. Laborers directly associated with the canal included the muleskinners who drove the teams of horses and mules, and the boat owners and captains. Six boatsmen and three boat makers resided in Alexandria Borough at mid-century; each lockkeeper lived rent-free in a company-owned dwelling, from which he was responsible for the two locks.<sup>36</sup> The boats appear in way bills as often as once a week, with names such as Farmer's Hope, Shamrock, Bonnet of Blue, and Minerva.<sup>37</sup>

#### Commerce/Industry

The impact of the canal was immediate. Mercantile emphases shifted away from the scale of general stores to wholesale businesses and large warehouses.<sup>38</sup> These were owned by individual merchants or partnerships, such as that of Conrad Bucher and John Porter. After their partnership ended in 1836, Porter is known to have shipped the iron of three companies, as well as coffee and various grains.<sup>39</sup>

Like many Alexandrians, Porter and Bucher both owned homes near their respective businesses at the east end of Main Street. Porter's two-story, brick Federal-style home (HABS No. PA-5407) exemplifies the typical middle-class dwelling in Alexandria throughout the nineteenth century. William Phillips, the merchant who transformed the Odd Fellows Hall (ca. 1834) into his residence, lived across the street from his general merchandise and dry goods store.

Another group of homes were erected toward the western end of Main Street during the 1830s--although it is often difficult to determine which tracts contained any buildings at all--and these were somewhat removed from the concentration of business establishments. One belonged to Alexander Stitt who owned a lucrative tannery (HABS No. PA-5396). His

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<sup>34</sup> Archer Hulbert, The Great American Canals, vol. 13, Historic Highways of America (Cleveland: 1902-05), reprint (NY: AMS Press, 1971), 211; McCullough, 28.

<sup>35</sup> State Archives Record Group No. 17, Juniata Division Reports 1826-40, Box 11.

<sup>36</sup> McCullough, 118-19.

<sup>37</sup> Harshbarger, 41, 45.

<sup>38</sup> Harshbarger, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Africa, 427.

three-bay, frame house on Main west of Hartslog Street provided something of a contrast to the brick homes of his prosperous neighbors down the street.

The transition to commercial and industrial center based on trading was less apparent in the central business district along Main Street where the oldest houses and stores owned by the same person were often close together. In contrast, the secondary areas away from Main Street, sometimes near the canal, witnessed a growing number of industrial sites that include Henry Willibrand's new brewery (HABS No. PA-5409), which still stands near the western edge of Alexandria; William Brown's weaving shop; George Wilson's cabinet-making concern; and three smithshops and two tanneries. One of these, the tannery of Robert Lytle and Alexander Stitt, occupied the single-largest business site in Alexandria at what would become the south side of the canal lock on Hartslog Street. Industrial concerns such as tanneries, smiths, breweries, and mills were logically located on the outer fringes of the community near water, which provided transportation as well as a power source.

In 1857, other Alexandria inhabitants were involved in a variety of commercial pursuits, as indicated by business notices posted that year: William Baker, carpenter and builder; J.H. Dysart, merchant and custom miller; William Moore, dealer in general merchandise; John Porter, farmer; W.S. Walker, manufacturer of tin and sheet-iron and copper ware, as well as stoves.<sup>40</sup>

By this time, the four blocks between Hartslog Street and Blue Run were lined with dwellings, shops and a handful of churches (Figure 3.3). E.P. Walker's general merchandise store, S. Hatfield & Company, was located in his two-story, brick gable-front store (HABS No. PA-5410) on Main Street. Though erected apart from the Main Street hub, it was next to Walker's house. Joseph Piper located his carriages and wagons firm toward the western end of Main Street, as Benjamin Cross did his carpentry shop and, at the terminus, the gristmill of Dr. J.M. Gemmill. The Cross house (HABS No. PA-5395), erected ca. 1851, boasts an excellent example of Greek Revival detailing on the front-facing gable, with pilasters and a dominating pediment. The balance of the building is unusual in that entrance is gained on the long facade, which has little ornamentation, and a sparse and irregular window arrangement.

### Community

The religious circles expanded with the arrival of the German Reformed Church and reconciliation of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>41</sup> Two congregations completed new churches in Alexandria in 1851: German Reformed (HABS No. PA-5412) and Presbyterian (HABS No. PA-5413). These two Greek Revival edifices were almost identical--perhaps designed by the same architect, or modeled on the same precedent. The two-story, rectangular-plan brick buildings were both modestly articulated by pilasters and recessed wall panels, into which tall windows were placed.

In 1868 the Methodist congregation left its old meeting house for a new, two-story

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<sup>40</sup> William Christy, "Borough of Alexandria in Porter Township" (map, 1857).

<sup>41</sup> Harshbarger, 35.

brick church it erected on lot No. 150, east of the former church on Main Street.<sup>42</sup> A year later, the Reformed Church--which has physically remained largely unaltered--dropped "German" from its name; by 1881 it became known as Christ Reformed Church.<sup>43</sup>

Following election of the first board of school directors in 1842, a number of schools opened in Alexandria. These include the Loop school, incorporated into the township's public system; a new one-story brick schoolhouse was erected in 1846 on the south corner of Main Street and the street leading to the canal basin; and the Octagon school was replaced by the McKibben Academy, led by Henry McKibben from 1853-76. The Alexandria High School (HA8S No. PA-5411), completed in 1869, continued as a teaching facility until the 1920s. Architecturally distinguished by an Italianate cupola and hipped roof, it is academically remembered for graduating the first high school class in Porter Township. Teaching was largely a male-dominated field, for at the time there were 130 male and six female teachers in the county.<sup>44</sup>

The social activities in Alexandria concurrent to the canal period were those of a prosperous--essentially one-class--community made up of self-made merchants, business owners, and laborers. One formal society, the International Order of Odd Fellows, Hartslog Lodge No. 286, was created in January 1848.<sup>45</sup> The group located its lodge on the busiest intersection in town, the corner of Bridge and Main streets (HA8S No. PA-5398). The two-story brick hall is distinguished from other similar dwellings on Main Street by an ogee arch over the front door.

The Odd Fellows shared the building with the Sons of Temperance society for a number of years. It enjoyed a sizable membership of ninety, including many of Alexandria's prominent merchants, until the Civil War when the number dropped off to only sixteen. In 1864 the lodge relinquished its charter and sold the hall to William Phillips. The latter purchased the lot across the street--which contained a log or frame building--in 1867 from the heirs of John Scott Sr., and a year later he erected the brick store. Phillips remodeled the Odd Fellows Hall into an imposing dwelling: a modestly styled but expansive seven bays, two stories tall on the main block and ell, with first- and second-story wraparound porches along the rear facades. Accounts differ, but between 1872-88, after the post-war repercussions had diminished, the Odd Fellows relocated to a new site, and by 1881 there were twenty-eight members.<sup>46</sup> In addition to the Odd Fellows, there existed Hartslog chapters of the Knights of the Golden Eagle and Freemasons.

General entertainments were presented on the diamond, including traveling Indian shows and show wagons featuring exotic animals, croquet, and the Alexandria Band performing in parades and town sings.

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<sup>42</sup> Harshbarger, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Africa, 434.

<sup>44</sup> Harshbarger, 58.

<sup>45</sup> Africa, 430.

<sup>46</sup> Africa, 430.

Throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the prosperous years of canal-shipping, the community of Alexandria flourished overall.

#### RAILROAD ERA: 1875 - 1930

Railroad transportation usurped canal use at a faster pace in some parts of the nation than others: it crossed the Allegheny Mountains in 1854, and thereafter began to replace the canal. Thus it was somewhat later in Alexandria when, in 1866, the Pennsylvania Railroad bought from the Pennsylvania Canal Company the main line east of Hollidaysburg for \$2,750. The canal company continued to operate the Juniata Division, as well as others, for several years in the interest of the railroad.<sup>47</sup>

The canal through Alexandria officially closed in 1875; the Juniata ironworks continued to flourish and represent the principal industry in the Hartslog area until the canal was abandoned. Prior to 1900, a single track was laid through town, which was served by a small railway station (HABS No. PA-5415) erected in 1897. The Pennsylvania Railroad main line bypassed Alexandria to go, instead, north through Barree. The closing had other tangible and negative impacts, such as the problem of water stagnating in the canal bed and flooding of the canal and river, but Alexandria was by and large spared the effects of an economic depression during the years before the railroad was fully established. Despite little construction or significant development, Alexandria seems to have sustained itself during this interim period. A history of 1883 describes the town as "having a refined and moral population, while the healthfulness and quiet beauty of the borough is not excelled by any village of its size in the state."<sup>48</sup>

The railroad's initiation of full-fledged shipping via Alexandria in 1900 (Figure 3.5) marks the beginning of a second--albeit briefer--era of prosperity. The refractory brick plant, which followed the arrival of the railroad, for instance, employed 150 to 200 men. The twentieth century witnessed the embellishment of Alexandria's modest townscape with the addition of laudable, high-style architecture. Credit for much of this belongs to two men of longtime Alexandria families: William Woolverton (1842-1914) and William Thompson (1823-1921). The men were cousins who spent part of their childhoods there, only to return after making their fortunes elsewhere. Thompson returned and proceeded to renovate and refurbish his family estate, Kilmarnock, of which only the carriage house remains (HABS No. PA-5405). Woolverton, a man of fashion and a society leader, established a farm and mansion near the home of his youth, used principally as a summer retreat. He called the estate, which was composed of at least 234 acres, Dorfgrenze Farm (later called Hartlog), which means "edge of the village."

Thompson and Woolverton commissioned and donated the Memorial Free Library (HABS No. PA-5414) to Alexandria in 1901, dedicating it to their mothers. The gesture was no doubt modeled after the extensive library-building program of industrialist Andrew Carnegie. The \$16,000 Renaissance Revival-style building occupies a conspicuous setting on the east corner

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<sup>47</sup> Harlow, 138.

<sup>48</sup> Africa, 426.

of Main and Hartslog Streets in the center of Alexandria, and it remains one of the most formal and unaltered buildings in town.

The library was designed by Frederick J. Shollar (1874-1960), a prominent Altoona-based architect who is credited with introducing Classical Revival styling to that town. Shollar, with and without his sometimes-partner Frank Hersh, designed numerous buildings in Altoona, including the Altoona Trust Company building, Rothert Building, city hall, and the Jaffa Mosque.<sup>49</sup> The stone for the Alexandria library's foundation came from a local quarry.<sup>50</sup> The library on the first floor was established with an initial 2,000 books, while the auditorium on the second floor hosted many of the town's social events.

Woolverton, a director of the Pennsylvania Railroad, also allegedly convinced the company to replace its old Alexandria station with a modern structure more stylistically compatible with the library, across the street and south of it, which occurred in 1904.

Meanwhile, in 1906 Thompson financed the reconstruction and design of the facade of the Presbyterian Church on Second Street in the memory of his father, the Reverend James Thompson, who served as a pastor there. Architects transformed the Greek Revival decor into Second Gothic Revival through the incorporation of a detailed entrance and pointed-arch windows.<sup>51</sup>

This second wave of prosperity in Alexandria was relatively shortlived, for the railroad could not long compete with its successor in transportation--the automobile. Passenger rail service ceased in Alexandria in 1930 at the beginning of the Great Depression, and all rail service ceased in the 1970s.

## CONCLUSION

Since the stock market crash of 1929 and the Depression of the 1930s, a stable industrial base has prevented a rapid decline in Alexandria's economic health. The town today contains the same largely middle-class population that has historically been characteristic of the borough. Many modern residents are retired, but the existing work force continues to be affiliated with local industries and businesses that include the federal government. This includes the largest employer, Owens-Corning Fiberglas, Mead Corporation west of Alexandria, and the prison in Huntingdon. Local merchants run the garage, an industrial-tire service, an appliance store, and similar small businesses.

Current housing consists of nearly all single-family dwellings, although a few have been converted to multiple use since the 1970s. In general the community is marked by very little new commercial or residential growth.

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<sup>49</sup> F.J. Shollar obituary, Altoona Mirror (16 January, 1960).

<sup>50</sup> Sara L. Keith, "History of the Memorial Alexandria Library and its Donors" (unpublished, 1971), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Harshbarger, 78.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Alexandria represents a well-preserved southwestern Pennsylvania town founded in 1793, that swelled during the early nineteenth century in a prosperous agricultural region along the Juniata River. The surrounding wealth of natural resources contributed to the implementation of the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal, from which the town benefitted from approximately 1830 to 1875. The historic core of Alexandria--which notably has not suffered from the addition of modern, intrusive buildings--is significant for its association with the canal and its integrity. Architectural resources include a distinguished array of residential, commercial, civic, and church buildings from ca. 1804 through the turn of the century that reflect the town's historic vitality as a commercial center along the nation's first major inland east-west transportation route. For this reason the buildings and structures extant in Alexandria should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as an historic district.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary and secondary resources, as well as public records, were used to document this Pennsylvania canal town. Several nineteenth-century publications offer contemporary depictions of life, such as J. Simpson Africa's History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania, Arms and White's 1745-1880: History of Indiana County, Pennsylvania, and the 1913 Indiana County, Pennsylvania by J.T. Stewart. These were augmented by many articles, periodicals and books published in recent years by local historical groups promoting an interest in canal heritage, such as Canal Currents, Indiana County Heritage, 1838-1988: Canal Days Sesquicentennial, and Hartslog Heritage. Publications devoted to chronicling the history of the canal itself are provided by Robert McCullough and Walter Leuba's The Pennsylvania Main Line Canal and Peter Wallner's doctoral thesis, "Politics and Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System." Public documents provided information on historical township and borough tax assessment, deeds and probate activities. Additional information was gleaned from historic maps and atlases, and forms produced as part of the Pennsylvania Historical Resources Survey.

### Books and Periodicals

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#### **Public Records**

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Huntingdon County deed books and probate records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

State Archives Record Group 17, Juniata Division Reports 1826-40 Box No. 11 (Misc).

U.S. Bureau of the Census Records, 1850-1880.

#### **Maps and Views**

Christy, William. "Borough of Alexandria in Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania." May 27, 1857. In the Alexandria Memorial Library.



## PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography was by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-two reports on individual buildings in Alexandria and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Huntingdon County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989). This report was Chapter 3 of that publication.

This assessment of the architectural and historical significance of two towns located along the route of the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal during the nineteenth century was completed during summer 1988. Dozens of modest commercial centers were historically located along the 395-mile waterway that linked Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but few can boast tangible remains from their heyday. Saltsburg, on the Kiskiminetas River, and Alexandria, on the Juniata River, were selected for study according to several criteria: for geographic location on flanking sides of the Allegheny Divide, for containing a building stock composed of a significant number of intact period buildings that date from the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and for the existence of a group of standing structures specifically associated with the canal as well as the visibly extant canal bed itself. The individual buildings for which HABS reports were prepared were selected from previously conducted surveys of the municipalities based on construction date, architectural and historical merit, and retention of architectural integrity (ie., original form and exterior siding with minor additions).

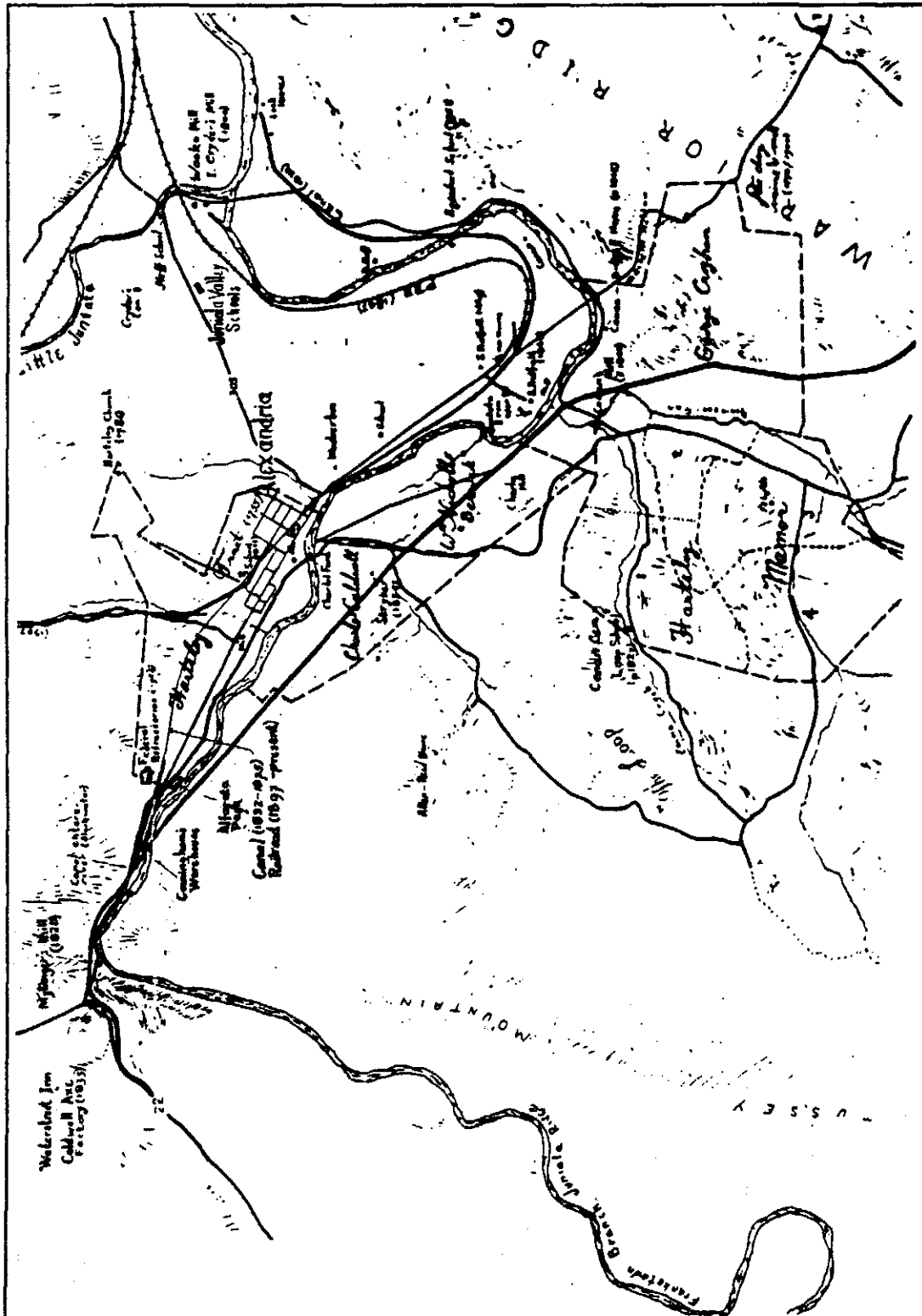


Figure 3.1. Vicinity of Alexandria, Porter Township, showing the Harrislog Tract of 1755 and the routes introduced by the canal and railroad (F.R. Zabriskie, 1975).

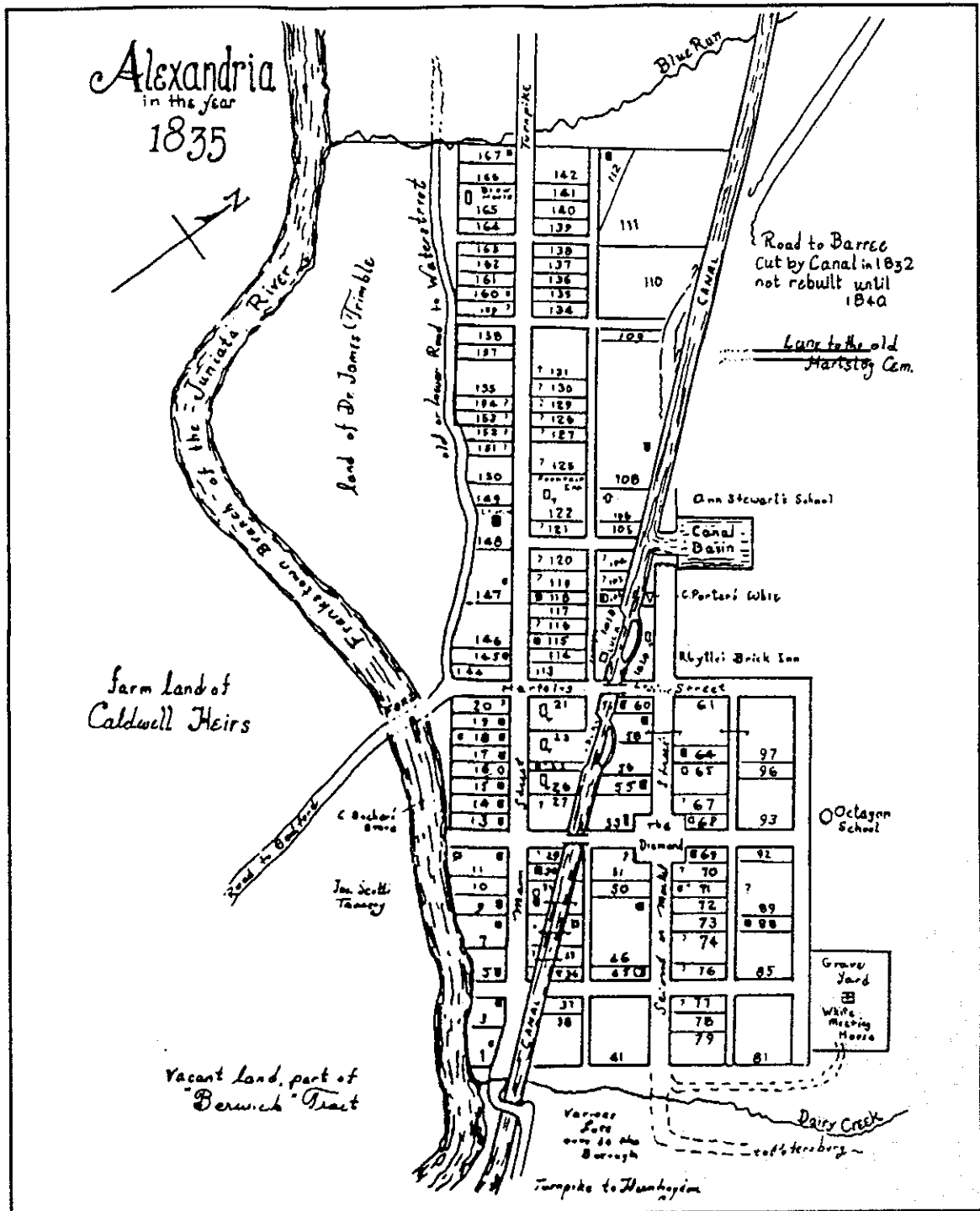


Figure 3.2 Map of Alexandria ca. 1835, showing the newly opened canal, lower road to Water Street, and developing street grid that is sparsely dotted with houses (J.P. Harshbarger et al., Hartslog Heritage, 1975).

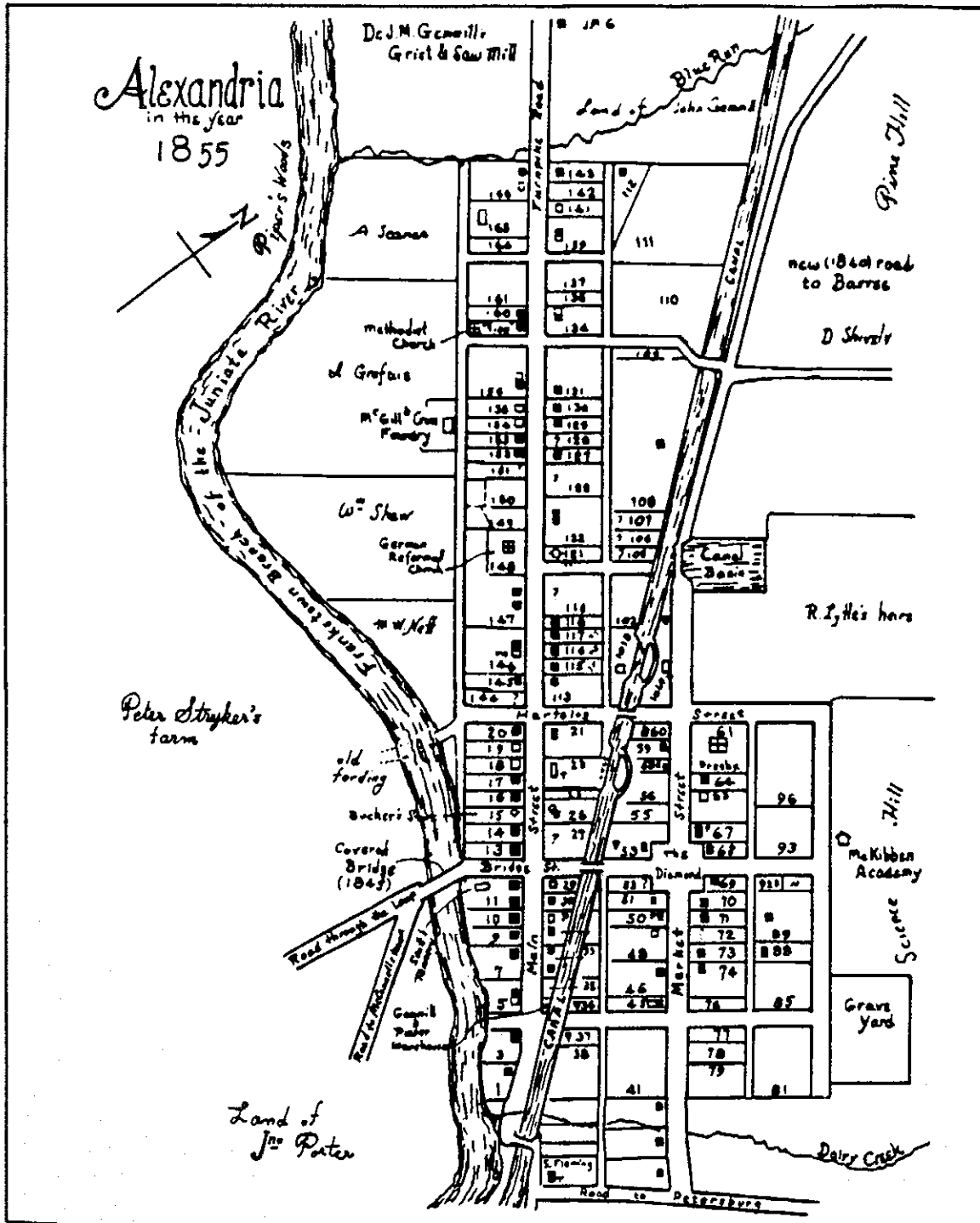


Figure 3.3 Map of Alexandria ca. 1855, showing the canal, covered bridge (1845), and burgeoning streetscape along the Turnpike Road (J.P. Harshbarger et al., *Hartslog Heritage*, 1975).

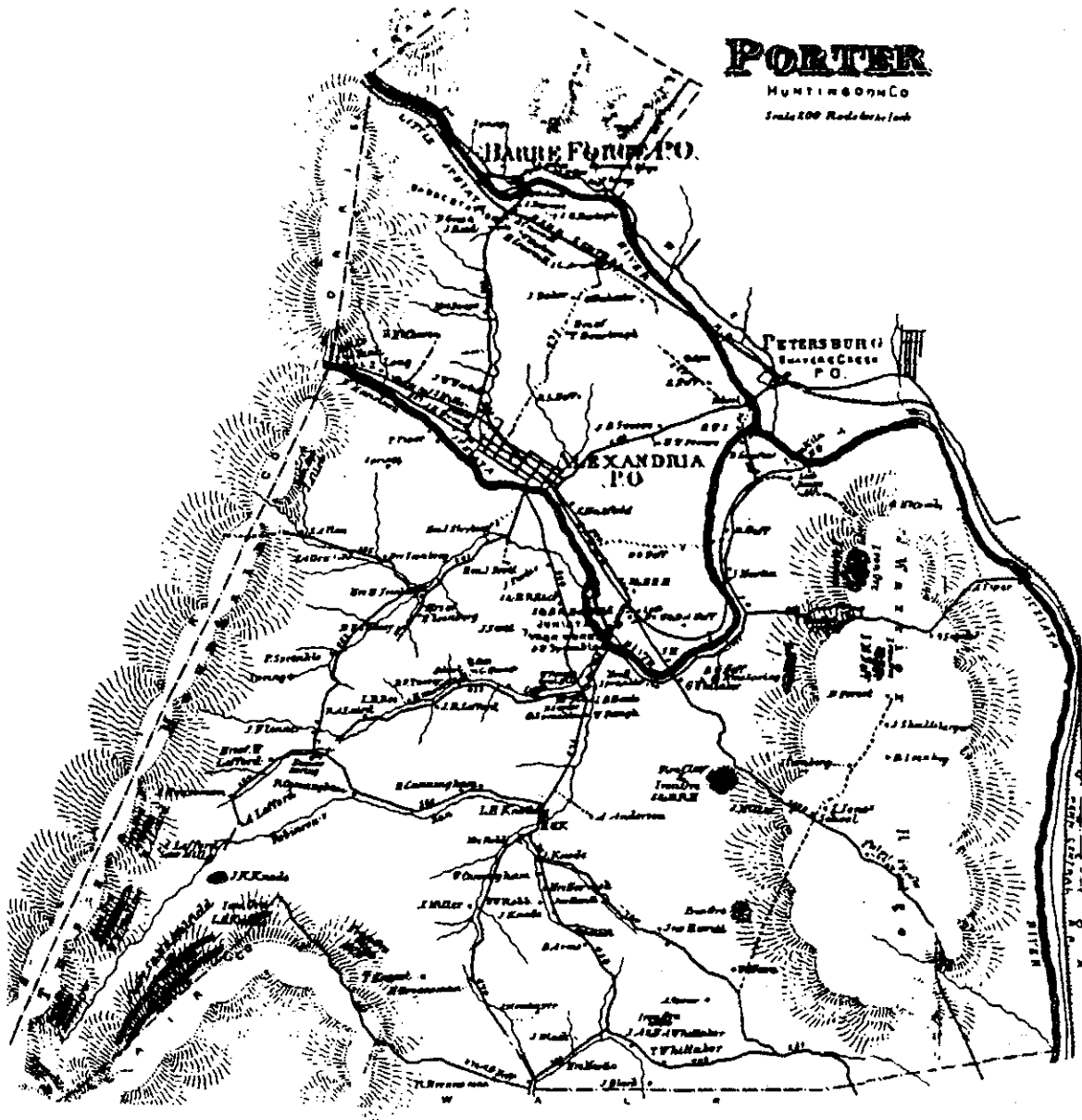


Figure 3.4 Map of Porter Township, Huntingdon County, 1873, showing Alexandria located between the Tussey Mountains and Warrior Ridge (Atlas of Blair and Huntingdon Counties, Pennsylvania, 1873).

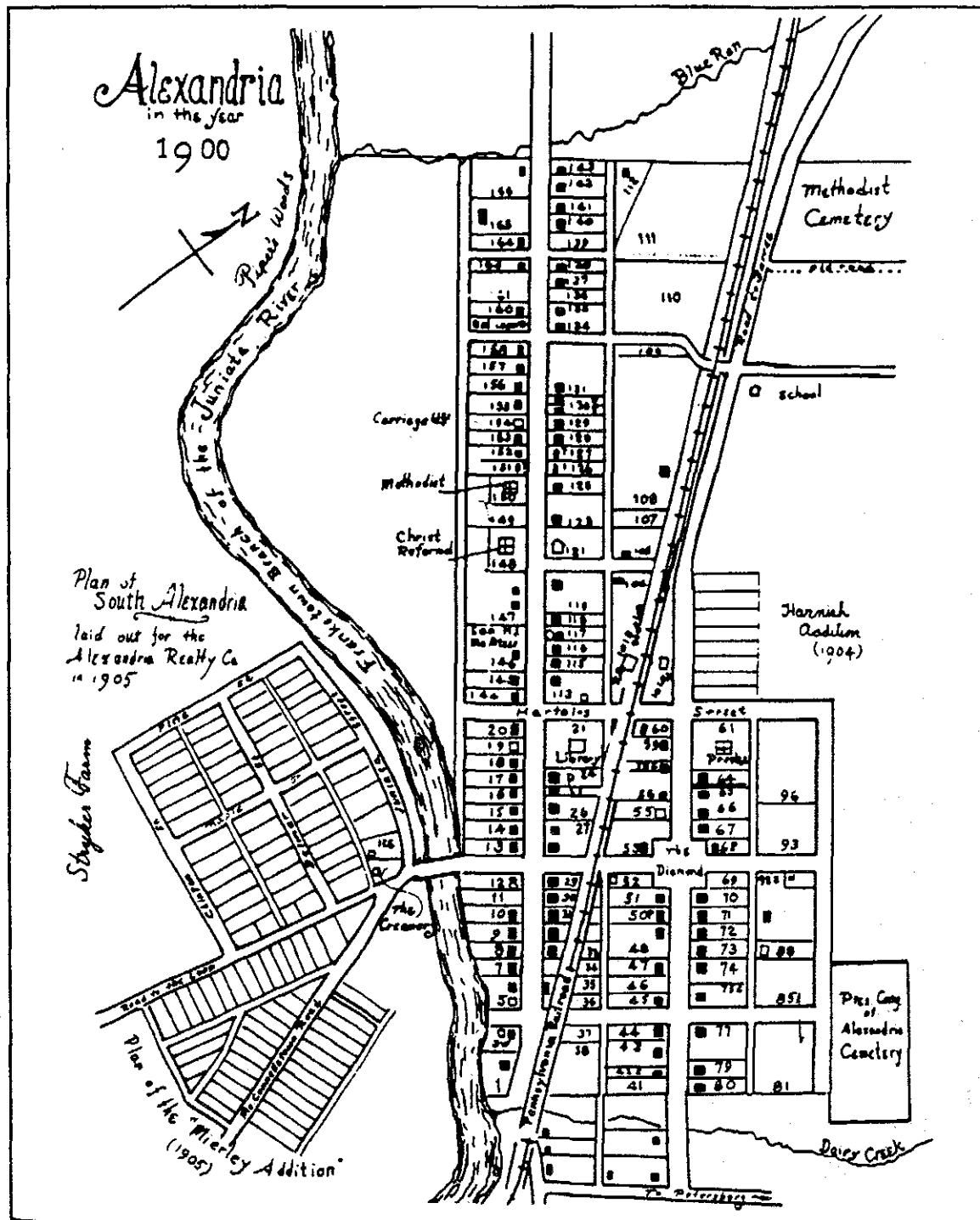


Figure 3.5 Map of Alexandria ca. 1900, showing the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks following the former canal bed and the new Mierley Addition across the Frankstown Branch of the Juniata River (J.P. Harshbarger et al., Hartslog Heritage, 1975).